

The Cheerful Letter

EVERY PLACE A CHURCH; EVERY DAY THE LORD'S DAY; ALL EVENTS BLESSINGS; ALL JOY
THANKSGIVING; AND ALL NATURE AND LIFE FULL OF GOD.—*James Freeman Clarke.*

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THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE

Adapted from Henry Van Dyke

[Time: Christmas Eve, A. D. 724. Bishop Winfried of England, named Boniface in the Roman tongue, and whom men called the Apostle of Germany, accompanied by young Prince Gregor of Moselle and a company of faithful pilgrims, is traveling slowly northward through the wide forest that rolls over the hills of central Germany.]

At the head of the band marched Winfried, clad in a tunic of fur. He carried a strong, tall staff in his hand, fashioned at the top into the form of a cross. Close beside him, keeping step like a familiar comrade, was the young Prince Gregor. Long marches through the wilderness had stretched his legs and broadened his back, and made a man of him in stature as well as in spirit. He was a mighty woodsman now, and could make a spray of chips fly around him as he hewed his way through the trunk of a pine-tree.

Behind these leaders followed a pair of teamsters, guiding a rude sledge, loaded with food and the equipage of the camp. Last of all came the rear guard, armed with bows and javelins. It was no child's play, in those days, to cross Europe afoot.

There were wide moors where the wolves hunted in packs as if the devil drove them, and tangled thickets where the lynx and the boar made their lairs. Fierce bears lurked among the rocky passes, and the gloomy recesses of the forest gave shelter to inhabitants who were still more cruel and dangerous than beasts of prey. The pilgrim who would pass from the mouth of the Tiber to the mouth of the Rhine must trust in God and keep his arrows loose in the quiver.

The travelers were surrounded by an ocean of trees. Gnarled oaks, with branches twisted and knotted as if in rage, rose in groves like tidal waves. Smooth forests of beech-trees, round and gray, swept over the knolls and slopes of land in a mighty ground-swell. The multitude of pines and firs, innumerable and monotonous, crowded

through the valleys and over the hills, rising on the highest ridges into ragged crests, like the foaming edge of breakers.

Through this sea of shadows ran a narrow stream of shining whiteness,—an ancient Roman road, covered with snow. Along this open track the travelers held their way,—heavily, for the drifts were deep; warily, for the hard winter had driven many packs of wolves down from the moors.

The sun, declining through its shallow arch, dropped behind the tree-tops. Darkness followed swiftly, as if it had been a bird of prey waiting for this sign to swoop down upon the world.

Winfried turned and spoke to his followers in a cheerful voice, that refreshed them like wine.

"Courage, brothers, and forward yet a little! Well know I that the journey is weary; and my own heart wearies also for the home in England, where those I love are keeping feast this Christmas Eve. But we have work to do before we feast tonight. For this is the Yuletide, and the heathen people of the forest are gathered at the thunder-oak of Geismar to worship their god, Thor. Strange things will be seen there, and deeds which make the soul black. But we are sent to lighten their darkness; and we will teach our kinsmen to keep a Christmas with us such as the woodland has never known."

The stars sparkled merrily through the strident air; the small, round moon shone like silver; little breaths of dreaming wind wandered across the pointed fir-tops, as the pilgrims toiled bravely onward, following their clew of light through a labyrinth of darkness.

After a while the road began to open out a little. Rude houses of hewn logs appeared in the openings, each one casting a patch of inky shadow upon the snow. Then the road plunged again into a dense thicket, and climbing to the left emerged suddenly upon a glade, round and level except at the northern side, where a hillock was crowned with a huge oak-tree. "Here," cried Winfried, as his eyes flashed and his hand lifted his heavy staff, "here is the thunder-oak; and

here the cross of Christ shall break the hammer of the false god Thor."

An immense fire had been kindled in front of the tree. Tongues of ruddy flame ascended through the spreading limbs and flung a fierce illumination upward and around. The pale, pure moonlight was quenched and eclipsed here. The oak stood like a pillar of cloud between the still light of heaven and the crackling, flashing fire of earth.

A great throng of people were gathered around it in a half-circle, their backs to the open glade, their faces toward the oak. The travelers paused for a moment at the edge of the thicket, and took counsel together.

"It is the assembly of the tribe," said one of the foresters. "All who swear by the old gods have been summoned. They will sacrifice a steed to the god of war, and drink blood, and eat horseflesh to make them strong. It will be at the peril of our lives if we approach them. At least we must hide the cross, if we would escape death."

"Hide me no cross," cried Winfried, lifting his staff, "for I have come to show it, and to make these blind folk see its power. There is more to be done here tonight than the slaying of a steed, and a greater evil to be stayed than the shameful eating of meat sacrificed to idols. Here the cross must stand and be our rede."

All the multitude were looking intently toward the fire at the foot of the oak. Then Winfried's voice rang out, "Hail, ye sons of the forest! A stranger claims the warmth of your fire in the winter night."

Swiftly a thousand eyes were bent upon the speaker. The semi-circle opened silently in the middle; Winfried entered with his followers; it closed again behind them.

Then as they looked round the curving ranks, they saw that the hue of the assemblage was not black, but white,—dazzling, radiant, solemn. White, the robes of the women, the glittering byrnies of the warriors, the fur mantles of the aged men, the raiment of a little group of children who stood close by the fire; white, with awe and fear, the faces of all who looked at them; and over all the flickering radiance of the flames glimmered like a faint, vanishing tinge of blood on snow.

The old priest, Hunrad, advanced slowly to meet the strangers.

"Who are you? Whence come you, and what seek you here?"

"Your kinsman am I," answered Winfried, "from England, beyond the sea, have I come to bring you a greeting from that land, and a message from the All-Father, Whose servant I am."

"Welcome, then," said Hunrad, "and be silent; for what passes here must be done before the moon crosses the middle heaven, unless, in-

deed, thou has some sign or token from the gods. Canst thou work miracles?"

Winfried's voice sank lower as he replied: "Nay, miracles have I never wrought, though I have heard of many; but the All-Father has given no power to my hands save such as belongs to common man."

"Stand still, then, thou common man," said Hunrad scornfully, "and behold what the gods have called us hither to do. This night is the death-night of the sun-god, Baldur the Beautiful, beloved of gods and men. This night the great Thor, the god of thunder and war, to whom this oak is sacred, is grieved for the death of Baldur, and angry with this people because they have forsaken his worship. Long is it since the roots of his holy tree have been fed with blood. Therefore the harvests have failed, and the wolf-hordes have ravaged the folds, and the strength has departed from the bow, and the wood of the spear has broken, and the wild boar has slain the huntsman. Therefore the plague has fallen on our dwellings, and the dead are more than the living in all our villages. Answer me, ye people, are not these things true?"

A hoarse sound of approval ran through the circle. A chant, in which the voices of the men and women blended, like the shrill wind in the pine-trees above the rumbling thunder of a waterfall, rose and fell in rude cadences:

"O Thor, the Thunderer,
Mighty and merciless,
Spare us from smiting!
Heave not thy hammer,
Angry, against us;
Mighty, have mercy,
Smite us no more,
Spare us and save us,
Spare us, Thor! Thor!"

The old priest stood silent for a moment. His shaggy brows swept down over his eyes like ashes quenching flame. Then he lifted his face and spoke.

"None of these things will please the god. Thor claims your dearest and your noblest gift."

Hunrad moved nearer to the group of children who stood watching the swarms of spark-serpents darting upward. Foremost among them and most intent on the pretty game, was a boy like a sunbeam, slender and quick, with blithe brown eyes and laughing lips. The priest's hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Here," said the old man, with his voice vibrating, "here is the chosen one, the eldest son of the chief, the darling of the people. Hearken, Bernhard, wilt thou go to Valhalla, where the heroes dwell with the gods, to bear a message to Thor?"

The boy answered, swift and clear: "Yes, priest, I will go if my father bids me. Is it far

away? Must I take my bow and arrows for the wolves?"

The chieftain Gundhar drew his breath deep, and leaned so heavily on the handle of his spear that the wood cracked. And his wife, Irma, bending forward from the ranks of women dragged at the silver chain about her neck until the rough links pierced her flesh, and the red drops fell unheeded on her breast. Yet no one spoke save Hunrad.

"Yes, my Prince, both bow and spear shalt thou have, for the way is long. But in darkness thou must journey for a little space, and with eyes blindfolded. Fearest thou?"

"Naught fear I," said the boy. "For I am Gundhar's son, and the defender of my folk."

Then the priest gave him his little bow tipped with silver, and his spear with shining head of steel. He bound the child's eyes with a white cloth, and bade him kneel with his face to the east.

The old man stooped to lift a black hammer of stone from the ground,—the sacred hammer of the god Thor. Summoning all the strength of his withered arms, he swung it high in the air. It poised for an instant above the child's fair head—then turned to fall.

One keen cry shrilled out from where the women stood: "Take me, not Bernhard!" The flight of the mother toward her child was swift as the falcon's swoop. But swifter still was the hand of the deliverer.

Winfried's heavy staff thrust mightily against the hammer's handle as it fell. Sideways it glanced from the old man's grasp, and the black stone, striking on the altar's edge, split in twain. A shout of awe and joy rolled along the living circle. As the shout died away the people saw the lady Irma, with her arms clasped round her child, and above them, on the altar-stone, Winfried, his face shining like the face of an angel.

Anger and wonder, reverence and joy and confusion surged through the crowd. The old priest crouched by the altar, silent. Conflicting counsels troubled the air. The angry voices clashed against each other and fell like opposing waves. Then the chieftain Gundhar struck the earth with his spear and gave his decision.

"All have spoken, but none are agreed. Keep silence, now, and let the stranger speak. His words shall give us judgment, whether he is to live or to die."

Winfried lifted himself high upon the altar, drew a roll of parchment from his bosom and began to read:

"A letter from the great Bishop of Rome, who sits on a golden throne, to the people of the forest."

A murmur of awe ran through the crowd. Winfried went on to read the letter:

"We have sent unto you our brother Boniface,

that he may teach you the only true faith, and baptize you, and lead you back from the ways of error to the path of salvation. Harken to him in all things like a father. Bow your hearts to his teaching. Worship not the false gods. Offer no more bloody sacrifices, nor eat the flesh of horses. Build a house for him that he may dwell among you, and a church where you may offer your prayers to the only living God, the Almighty King of Heaven."

The dignity of the words imposed mightily upon the hearts of the people.

"Tell us, then," said Gundhar, "what is thy counsel for the tribes of the woodland on this night of sacrifice?"

"This is the counsel," answered Winfried. "Not a drop of blood shall fall tonight, save that which pity has drawn from the breast of your princess. Not a life shall be blotted out in the darkness; but the great shadow of the tree which hides you from the light of heaven shall be swept away. For this is the birth-night of the white Christ, Son of the All-Father, and Saviour of mankind. The dark Thor, on whom you vainly call, is dead. See, my brothers, you call this tree his oak. Does he dwell here? Does he protect it?"

Winfried beckoned to Gregor. "Bring the axes, thine and one for me. The king-tree of the forest must fall, and swiftly, or all is lost!"

The two men took their places facing each other, one on each side of the oak. Their cloaks were flung aside, their heads bare. Firmly they grasped the axe-helves and swung the shining blades.

"Tree-god!" cried Winfried, "art thou angry? Thus we smite thee!"

"Tree-god!" answered Gregor, "art thou mighty? Thus we fight thee!"

Clang! clang! The alternate strokes beat time upon the hard, ringing wood. The broad flakes flew from the deepening gashes in the sides of the oak. The huge trunk quivered. Then the great wonder came to pass.

Out of the stillness of the winter night, a mighty rushing noise sounded overhead. A strong, whirling wind passed over the tree-tops. It gripped the oak by its branches and tore it from the roots. Backward it fell, like a ruined tower, groaning and crashing as it split asunder in four great pieces.

Winfried let his axe drop, and bowed his head for a moment in the presence of almighty power. Then he turned to the people. "Here is the timber," he cried, "already felled and split for your new building. On this spot shall rise a chapel to the true God.

"And here," said he, as his eyes fell on a young fir-tree, standing straight and green, with its top pointing toward the stars, "here is the living tree, with no stain of blood upon it, that shall be the

sign of your new worship. See how it points to the sky. Call it the tree of the Christ-child. You shall go no more into the shadows of the forest to keep your feasts with secret rites of shame. You shall keep them at home, with laughter and songs and rites of love. The thunder-oak has fallen, and the day is coming when there shall not be a home in all Germany where the children are not gathered around the green fir-tree to rejoice in the birth-night of Christ."

So they took the little fir from its place, and carried it in joyous procession to the house of Gundhar. He bade them throw open the doors of the hall and set the tree in the midst of it. They kindled lights among the branches until it seemed to be tangled full of fire-flies. The children encircled it, wondering, and the sweet odor of the balsam filled the house.

Then Winfried stood beside the chair of Gundhar, on the dais at the end of the hall, and told the story of the Bethlehem; of the Babe in the manger, of the shepherds on the hills, of the host of angels and their midnight song. All the people listened, charmed into stillness.

But the boy Bernhard, on Irma's knee, grew restless as the story lengthened, and began to prattle softly at his mother's ear.

"Mother," whispered the boy, laying his finger on the stains upon her breast, "see, your dress is red! What are these stains? Did some one hurt you?"

The mother closed his mouth with a kiss. "Dear, be still, and listen!"

The boy obeyed. His eyes were heavy with sleep. But he heard the last words of Winfried as he spoke of the angelic messengers, flying over the hills of Judea and singing as they flew. The child wondered and dreamed and listened. Suddenly his face grew bright.

"Oh, mother!" he whispered, "do not speak. Do you hear them? Those angels have come back again. They are singing now behind the tree."

And some say that it was true; but others say that it was only Gregor and his companions at the lower end of the hall, chanting their Christmas hymn:

"All glory be to God on high,

And on the earth be peace!

Goodwill, henceforth, from heaven to men,
Begin and never cease."

A LIFE spent in brushing clothes, and washing crockery, and sweeping floors—a life which the proud of the earth would have treated as the dust under their feet; a life spent at the clerk's desk; a life spent in the narrow shop; a life spent in the laborers' hut—may yet be a life so ennobled that for the sake of it a king might gladly yield his crown.—*Canon Farrar.*

THE CRATCHITS' CHRISTMAS DINNER

[Taken from the famous *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Bob Cratchit is a poorly paid clerk in a London business office, and the good time he had with his family is contrasted with the selfish dreariness of another, richer man's life.]

MRS. CRATCHIT, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence, laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons, while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, and danced about the table, while the slow potatoes, bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan lid to be let out and peeled.

"What has ever got your precious father then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim? And Martha wa'n't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour."

"Here's Martha, mother," cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times and taking off her bonnet and shawl for her, with officious zeal.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," said the girl, "and had to clear away this morning, mother."

"Well, never mind, so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit. "Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!"

"No, no! There's father coming!" cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. "Hide, Martha! Hide!"

So Martha hid herself. And in came Bob, the father, his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable, and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim—he bore a little crutch, and had limbs supported by an iron frame.

"Why—where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking round.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming?" said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim's horse all the way from church, and had come home rampant. "Not coming home on Christmas Day?"

Martha didn't like to see him disappointed, if only in joke, so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim and bore him off into the washhouse, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

"And how did little Tim behave at church?" asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on

his credulity, and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart's content.

"As good as gold," said Bob, "and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant for them to remember on Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool beside the fire; and Master Peter and the two young Cratchits went to the bakeshop to fetch the roast goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds—and in truth it was something like that in the little house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot. Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor. Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce. Martha dusted the hot plates. Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table. The two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and, mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all around the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried, "Hurrah!"

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavor, its size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by the apple sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), "they hadn't ate it all at last!" Yet everyone had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows.

But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose

somebody should have got over the wall of the back yard and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose; a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid. All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating house and a pastry cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding. In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered, flushed, but smiling proudly, with the pudding, like a speckled cannon ball, so hard and firm, with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

"Oh, a wonderful pudding!" Bob Cratchit said, and calmly, too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that, now the weight was off her mind she would confess that she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. Apples and oranges were put upon the table and a shovelful of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, and Bob proposed:

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God bless us!" Which all the family reëchoed.

"God bless us, every one," said Tiny Tim. He sat very close to his father's side.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

O, LOVE ETERNAL, Who dost show Thyself in the face of the Child, heir of the ages and hope of glory; may the spirit of peace and goodwill fall upon us in this blessed season. May we all grow young again in the heart that never knows age. May the spirit man be the candle of the Lord. As we gather together in families, may love be a holy flame. May kindness abound. May the invisible Star rest over our dwellings to guide home dear ones from far away and strangers faint and hungry for a welcome. May the doctrine and life of Jesus Christ be the shining dayspring in our hearts. For the sake of every man. *Amen.*—(Selected.)

SENTENCE SERMON

If instead of a gem or even a flower, we could cast the gift of a lovely thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give.

—George Macdonald.

THE BOOK AND MAGAZINE CLUB

Send all offers and requests for this department to Mrs. Henry R. Austin, 100 Elm Ave., Wollaston, Mass.

Please remember, when you see a request for a book in the Book Club, to write a card asking "Shall I send such a book to such a person?" before sending it, else the person who requests it may receive several copies. When any one writes directly to you, asking for a book offered by you, send a card to Mrs. Austin, saying that you have sent it. When you receive more requests than you can meet, send those to the Book Club to be printed here.

SPECIAL NOTICES

It will greatly aid those who are sending books, magazines, cards, and so forth, if all our correspondents who send requests for their children will take pains to mention their names and ages. Lacking such information, one is likely to make mistakes; for a boy of twelve and a girl of seven are not usually interested in the same things.

When requesting books for the first time, correspondents should always give, as reference, the name and address of their clergyman.

When correspondents move to a new address, notice should be sent either to our headquarters, 16 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass., or to those persons who have been sending books and magazines.

It is necessary to state positively that the Cheerful Letter Exchange is not a "clothing bureau" and not a "charitable" society in the usual sense of the word. We do not undertake to send correspondents money, clothing or household goods. Letters asking for that sort of assistance cannot receive attention. Letters not signed cannot be printed.

Many people do care for just the kind of friendly service for which we are organized. We limit our efforts to them and their wishes.

Those who enjoy receiving books and magazines are asked to remember that they, in their turn, can give much pleasure if they will take pains to write to the persons who send such reading matter. In cases where no word of response goes back—not even to say that the books or magazines were received—senders may suppose the parcels were not welcome. Let us each do our share.

Only books of an instructive or wholesomely amusing character should be offered. Classics, educational works, and standard novels and magazines are always acceptable.

1. I would be glad to get good reading, book or magazine; also the *Cheerful Letter* paper, even after someone else has read it. I can't walk to visit the neighbors, and love flowers so much. If any of you has any flowering bulbs of any kind left when you finish planting yours, even if it is late, you will add happiness to one that is almost an invalid. Thank you. Mrs. F. A. Austin, R. 2, Box 190, Marshville, N. C.

2. Mrs. E. M. Backus, Dade City, Fla., is very anxious for books or magazines on Psychical Research or Psychology. If anyone could loan her books on these subjects she guarantees the return of the same in good condition.

3. I thank the *Cheerful Letter* friends for cards and scraps they sent for my daughter that is away from home. She is 37 years old, and has been afflicted most all her life. She has been in the epileptic hospital over three years. I hope you people will remember her later on. (Mrs.) Ella J. Nolen, Endicott, Va.

4. Alice B. Foley, Elamsville, Va., R. 1, Box 44, is 13 years old. She would like suitable reading matter for herself and little brothers,

ages 7 and 10, and picture books for her four-year-old sister.

5. Mrs. Nan Adams, Lansing, N. C., will be glad of any reading matter.

6. Lillie Cooper, Rupert, Ark., asks for embroidery remnants, crochet thread and reading matter.

7. Mrs. Nattie Rhoades, Cleveland, Ark., mother of two little girls, would be glad to get books for small children, or anything that would amuse them. For reference, Rev. John McCay, Cleveland, Ark.

8. Mrs. Belle Mason, Rupert, Ark., sends grateful thanks for all the *Cheerful Letter* friends have done for her.

9. Mrs. Lalie Sexton, Grassy Creek, N. C., R. 2, Box 103, would like suitable reading for her four children, ranging in age from 5 to 11.

10. Mrs. John Jones, Brandon, N. C., would appreciate anything for her three little children, the baby and two little boys, ages 3 and 4 years.

11. Mrs. M. E. Eller, Silas Creek, N. C., asks for scraps of yarn for knitting.

12. Mrs. W. O. Collins, Tolar, Hood Co., Texas, R. 2, would very much appreciate any good reading for herself and three daughters.

13. I am 19 years old and live in a very out-of-the-way place, and I get very lonesome at times. Would be glad to receive any kind of reading matter, old magazines or books. Would especially like to get some *Saturday Evening Posts* and *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and the book, "St. Elmo." Thanking you in advance, (Miss) Binnie Wann, Wills Point, Texas.

14. Mrs. Bessie McFarland, Manchester, N. C., would like reading matter for the winter, and embroidery designs and wool for making wool flowers.

15. Stella Parsons, Grassy Creek, N. C., R. 2, would appreciate reading and good cheer for the winter.

16. I am writing to ask you to try to secure some reference works for me, such as commentaries on either the Old or New Testament, or notes such as Barnes', or notes on the International Sunday School Lessons. I am in need of help of this kind, but on account of sickness, doctor's bills, and hospital bills I am not able to buy them. (Rev.) D. J. Bryant, Floyd, Va.

17. I wish to thank you all for the many things which you have sent me. I have a little girl 8 years old, who has been with me since last spring. Would be glad if the *Cheerful Letter* friends will remember us at Xmas. Gratefully, Mrs. Jennie Jones, Clifton, N. C.

18. Mrs. Luke C. Rice, Winnett, Mont., writes: "I would be very glad to receive books, papers and magazines, both for myself and to give out to my neighbors. We live in a very remote district, twenty-five miles from post office or stores, and anyone up to twelve miles away is a neighbor. Our winters are long and severe. We put in many lonely days, and sometimes are shut-ins for weeks."

19. I write to ask you for magazines, books, or anything to help me along with my school. I am teaching near Guilford College, N. C. My school is a one-teacher school. I should be so pleased if I could get some seat work for first and second grades, for I know that is what I shall need. Thanking you in advance, I am, your friend, (Mrs.) Mildred Alley, Guilford College, N. C.

20. I am a young girl. My mother is dead, and my father is old and almost entirely blind. I had to stop school so as to keep house for my father and two brothers, aged 15 years and 19 years, also my sister, aged 12. I am alone most of the day, as my sister goes to school. I would like very much to receive some books and magazines, or any good literature will be appreciated, as I get very lonesome. I would also like any sewing material. For reference I am sending my pastor's name, Rev. E. E. Lamb, Pleasant

View, Va. Thanking you in advance, (Miss) Farrar Hamner, Knoll, Va.

21. Mrs. Hattie Davis, Xenia, Green Co., Ohio, R. 2, would like reading and any cheer for herself or little daughter. Her daughter, now 18 years old, has been a hopeless invalid from infantile paralysis since eleven months old. The mother is confined to the house continually caring for this little invalid. Mrs. Davis enjoys all good reading.

22. Mrs. Kate Powers, Brandon, N. C., asks for cheer through the coming winter for herself and three little girls, ages from 4½ to 10 years.

23. Mrs. Stella Johnson, Sturgills, N. C., is hoping to have a community Xmas tree again, and writes asking the *Cheerful Letter* friends for help. There will be about fifty children who have never seen a tree. She would like trimmings for the tree, a Santa costume, and anything the friends care to send her for little gifts for the children.

24. Mrs. Ruth Ashley, Unionville, Va., R. 2, Box 28, thinks her friends have forgotten her, and would appreciate a letter.

25. Mrs. Robert Hines, Athens, Texas, R. 1, Box 96, will be grateful for letters and reading for her family, consisting of her husband, a girl of 23, and two boys, 18 and 13.

26. Dorris Tuggle, Elamsville, Va., Patrick Co., asks for the *Youth's Companion*, and anything to help her in her studies; she is a shut-in and studies at home.

27. Mrs. W. A. Blackburn, Grassy Creek, N. C., will appreciate any reading, especially the *Youth's Companion*.

28. Mrs. G. Wallace, Grassy Creek, N. C., has recently lost her husband, and asks for cheer.

29. Mrs. Bettie Hundley, Stuart, Va., R. 5, sends sincere thanks to those who have remembered her, and asks for crochet thread and embroidery floss.

30. Mrs. Alice Barker, Dott, W. Va., Box 96, asks for reading and toys for her grandchildren. Her son likes Western stories.

31. Mrs. Baxter Neaves, Jefferson, N. C., sends grateful thanks for past favors, and hopes to receive quilt scraps or thread.

32. Mrs. Addie Harmon, Decatur, Tenn., R. 2, with two children, a boy, Elmer, four, and Ruth, two years of age, living on a farm nine miles from town, often gets blue and discouraged, and will appreciate any reading and pictures for the children.

33. Mrs. H. H. Foster, Post, Texas, Box 132, asks for suitable reading for her father, 73 years of age, also picture books for little boys and girls, neighbors, who will enjoy cutting out paper dolls. She would also like plants or bulbs.

34. It has been about five months since I heard from any of the *Cheerful Letter* friends. I wish to thank the friends for their kindness. I

cannot tell you how much happiness you brought into our home last Christmas. I have tried to send individual thanks to every one. I have five boys, 16, 9, 7, 2 years, and baby, six months, and three girls, 14, 11, and 5. I would be glad to receive magazines and quilt scraps from anyone and would be glad to correspond with some of the *Cheerful Letter* ladies. Mrs. Rebecca V. Akin, Leo, Texas.

35. I am writing you, asking for magazines to read. I am getting old and have spare time to read, and would enjoy magazines of any kind. Mrs. Onie Shively, Bassett, Va.

36. *Dear Cheerful Letter Folks:* I am writing again to let you know I am still living. I haven't written but once since my husband died, and that was three years the 9th of November. I still miss him so much and see where I need him more and more each day. Both children are in school. Peyton is 10 years old, and in the high four grade, and Mary Ellen is 8, and in the three high. She is very fond of reading, and I hope some of you can send her some books about little girls. Peyton likes short stories. Mrs. W. H. Harris, 1002 17th Street, Lynchburg, Va.

37. Cordia M. Testerman of Lansing, N. C., wishes to thank all who have sent her papers and magazines, and will appreciate any you wish to send her. She received some papers and magazines with no name on them, and wishes to thank whoever sent them very much.

38. My widowed mother and I live alone, and we have a hard time trying to make a living, as we live on the farm. My mother has been in bad health for several years, part of the time unable to do any work at all. My father has been dead eighteen years. We would greatly appreciate sewing material; also the books, "Helen's Victory" and "His Heart's Queen," would be appreciated very much. For reference I give Rev. Budd Joyce, Sandy Ridge, R. 1, N. C. Miss Curtie Alger Smith, Lamsonville, N. C., R. 1.

39. It has been some time since I wrote you before. I am feeling some better now. I sure do thank every *Cheerful Letter* friend for remembering me, and for what nice quilt pieces they sent. I wrote them all, but want to thank them again. I hope to be remembered by them, during the Christmas holidays, with quilt pieces and bits of thread to keep me busy, as I cannot visit my neighbors. I can remember my kind friends by my quilt squares. Mrs. Herritt Leffew, Dodson, Va., Star Route.

40. Mrs. Lilla Smith, Sandidges, N. C., R. 1, sends her thanks to the *Cheerful Letter* friends who have sent her so much happiness, and hopes to receive more reading for herself and eleven-year-old daughter.

41. Miss India Pendleton, Elamsville, Va., sends her grateful thanks to those who sent her

things in the past, and would like to be remembered this winter with quilt pieces and embroidery cotton. Also reading for her daughter of eighteen.

42. Mrs. G. R. Stike, Crumpler, N. C., has not heard from the *Cheerful Letter* friends in a long while, and asks for reading during the cold winter, also scraps and bits of thread.

43. Mrs. Margaret Johnson, White Top, Va., R. 2, Box 83 A, wishes to express her gratitude for all things sent her, and asks that she be not forgotten through the long winter. She has six children, ages from 18 years to seven months, all girls.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Mrs. F. M. Martin, formerly Waxahachie, Texas, is now at Midlothian, Texas.

Mrs. Mae Roberts has moved from Brandon, N. C., to Chilhowie, Va., R. 1, care of Mrs. G. B. Mize.

Mrs. Joanna Crook has moved from Denton, N. C., to Columbia, S. C., Box 1437.

BELLS OF CHRISTMAS

BELLS of Christmas on the night air falling,
Heard in the street, on moorland and on lea;
We listen to their glad sweet music calling
Earth's wanderers back to home from land and sea.

And as of old beneath the Syrian stars
The angels sang, "Goodwill and peace to men";
So now these Christmas bells bid strife and wars
And tumults cease, and Peace return again.

To scattered families, to sundered friends,
To storm-tossed mariners, to burdened hearts,
To toilworn men and women here descends
A benediction as the sound departs.

Thus down through all the far-off generations,
To all the many coloured tribes of men,
The Lord's birth song in sweet reverberations
Brings "Peace—Goodwill" at Christmas time again.

—J. Lonsdale Cox.

SCIENCE is a first-rate piece of furniture for a man's upper chamber, if he has common-sense on the ground floor. But if a man has not plenty of good commonsense, the more science he has the worse for his work.—O. W. Holmes.

SWEETEST water flows over granite. Finest love comes out of the strongest men.—J. H. Jowett.

"GOOD HEALTH" NOTES NO. 9.

It was our good fortune to attend the Women's Exposition of Arts and Industries recently held at the Hotel Astor, New York City, and it would require many columns to exhaust the material found there of interest to every type of visitor. One passed from "beauty" booths to those offering curative provision for all parts of the body and soul and in each one smiling, energetic women were in charge, fully qualified to "carry on" in any form of business or professional life.

If at all discouraged about social or business conditions, a visit to this yearly gathering of the women who are "doing" will lift the gloom, and make one pass into the street crowds again happy, though weary!

Among the booths showing various forms of welfare activities, perhaps that creating the keenest interest was the "Health Center," with its ideal equipment for the child, and maternity suggestions, the most conspicuous article being the large wicker basket, painted white, with rounded corners and strong handle over the middle part to slip over the arm in carrying the baby. In it was a suitably dressed doll, lying on the proper mattress, with correct bedding folded in the most approved fashion. This would be an easy thing to "copy" by the young mother, to take the place of bassinet for the first weeks of baby's career.

From the stage over one end of the main auditorium health talks were given, with demonstrations of posture, walking (correct and incorrect), and curative foot exercises were exhibited. A group of young women illustrated "Dancing for Health," and seemed to enjoy the process heartily.

A special feature of the exposition was scientific cooking, crowds constantly surrounding the tables on which prize articles of food were shown. Ida Bailey Allen, whose radio talks are eagerly listened to by thousands, explained each night the cooking efficiency contest running through the week, and carried on in sight of all on the raised platform with microphone, extending the story to those fortunate enough to be "tuned in." The reward, a trip to Europe, was made possible by the Federated Women's Clubs, and it was awarded on a basis of merit for speed, dietetics, and quality of cooking. Electrical equipment taken from floor booths and set up on the stage was used, the contestants never having used it previously, and on it was cooked a five-course dinner, of "suitable ingredients for a family to be well nourished, but not stuffed to dullness." This was cooked and served inside of thirty minutes, one contestant accomplishing the feat in twenty-three, and a sixteen-year-old high school girl doing it inside of twenty-nine, the meal including minute steak, green spinach, candied

sweet potatoes, and peach turnover! Each contestant chose her menu, and served the meal to two "guests," selected from among the "celebrities" present, who were seated at a charmingly set table graced with flowers, and who passed upon the merits of the food consumed.

Many thousands visited the exposition, among them groups of high school girls in search of prize essay material, and incidentally receiving a liberal education.

Rose O'Niell, of "Kewpie" fame, drew her beloved child in sight of all, on a canvas placed on an easel, holding conversation with him during the process, audible on her part, but the Kewpies, of necessity, repeated aloud for our benefit by his fond parent. Propped in a row on chairs were admiring smaller brothers and sisters, and when the picture was finished, she selected several of them to throw out among the observers below, making some children blissful, as proud possessors of the "huggable, safe, soft, floppy darlings."

A gas company showed a model kitchen in the gayest of coloring, curtains, utensils and furniture matching, a delightful creation and one which will be widely adopted, we are certain. In electrical articles, especially, aluminum appeared at the exposition in fascinating array. As a metal, it is coming into its own, and with tin at \$1,500 a ton it is not surprising. Scientists have been seeking to replace the "tin can" or "tin," as the English call it, with one of cheaper metal. Germany is using aluminum for this, and in America we have had containers for tooth pastes, shaving cream, etc., for some time. We are told there is little if any chemical action between aluminum and fruits and fish canned in it, and the metal may be used over and over. Apparently the belief that aluminum is dangerous to use with acids must be put in the discard, the past experience of housewives in deterioration of food products in such containers being due to the fact that they were made at first with a thin coating of aluminum on iron. Perhaps the existing prejudice against the use of aluminum for cooking acids may be largely accounted for by the suggestions of those interested in selling enamel ware, conscious as they must be of the advantages of material for cooking utensils that will not chip and get in the food they contain, to cause possible serious internal troubles.

We must, however, confess to a sneaking liking for enamel pots, especially for foods that burn easily, but one cannot be too careful in watching their condition, those with broken patches, with the metal showing through, being utterly unfit for use.

The new heavy aluminum ware on the market, in which food may be cooked without water, on the principle of French paper bag cookery, is ideal, but much too expensive for the average homemaker, at present. Its trade name is, we

believe, the Gould ware, and demonstrations of its possibilities may be secured for groups of women, in homes or clubs, on which occasions delectable luncheons are partaken of, and as a result many saucepans and pots are purchased by the astonished and delighted guests.—*Laura Robinson Donnell.*

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O LITTLE town of Bethlehem! How still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to-night.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray,
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell,
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel Amen.

—*Phillips Brooks.*

If we are indeed here to perfect and complete our own natures, and grow larger, stronger and more sympathetic against some nobler career in the future, we had all best bestir ourselves to the utmost while we have time.—*R. L. Stevenson.*

WITH OUR HOME-KEEPERS

FAVORITE RECIPES

Rice Cakes.—Mix 1 cup of boiled rice with $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour mixed and sifted with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt and 2 teaspoons of baking powder. And 1 well beaten egg and sufficient milk to make a thin batter, beat well and bake on a hot greased griddle.

Raisin Ginger Drops.—Ever make raisin ginger drops? They are very good: One cup brown sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fat, 1 cup molasses, 1 cup boiling water, 3 cups flour, 1 teaspoon soda, 1 teaspoon baking powder, $\frac{1}{3}$ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon cinnamon and 1 cup raisins. Cream fat and add sugar. Mix well. Add the molasses and boiling water. Add the rest of the ingredients. Mix well. Drop from end of spoon on greased pan or cookie sheet. Bake 15 minutes in moderate oven. Watch carefully while baking as they are apt to burn easily on account of the molasses and brown sugar.

Dark Fudge Cake.—Place $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk, 2 squares cooking chocolate and 1 egg yolk in small saucepan, and cook, stirring constantly until thick and creamy. Remove from fire and add butter the size of an egg. Place egg white, unbeaten, in mixing bowl, add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk, 1 cup sugar and $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour, sifted, with 1 teaspoon soda, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cream of tartar and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cloves. Notice the small quantity of cream of tartar, but $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon is correct. Beat, and add cooked mixture last, beating until creamy. Frost with 1 teaspoon butter melted in 5 teaspoons hot water. Add 1 teaspoon vanilla and 1 cup confectioners' sugar.

Poached Eggs.—Put shallow pan over fire, half fill with water, add 1 teaspoon salt and 2 table-spoons vinegar; let get scalding hot; drop eggs into water, let stand 5 minutes without boiling. Butter toast and with a skimmer take up eggs and slide on toast; dot with bits of butter and salt and pepper.

Sweet Potato Puff.—Boil sweet potatoes, peel and press through ricer, season with salt, butter, a little brown sugar. Add 1 beaten egg, moisten with enough milk or cream to beat. Whip or beat until very fluffy. Now add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cold minced sausage. Pile lightly in baking dish. Brown quickly in hot oven.

HANDY HINTS

When frying ham or bacon always place it in the pan before putting the pan on the fire. It cooks and browns quicker and better than if put in a warm pan.

It is a good plan to dip brooms in very hot soapsuds once a week. This toughens the bristles, and the brooms not only last longer, but also sweep better than if they were kept perfectly dry.

If washing in luke warm water does not remove blood stains, try a little ammonia on them.

Silverware may be kept always bright if washed in water in which potatoes have been boiled. The potato water may be kept bottled for that purpose.

Water in which vegetables are boiled should always be saved as it contains the most valuable minerals and vitamins. It may be used as stock in making soup.

A PAGE FOR THE CHILDREN

CHRISTMAS IN THE YEAR ONE

[This is a part of a book called *When the King Came*, written by the Rev. George Hodges. The publishers of the book, Houghton Mifflin Company, allow it to be reprinted here for the children who read the *Cheerful Letter*.]

ONCE upon a time there was a Year One. Strangely enough, it was not the beginning of the years. The world was already very old—nobody knows how old. People had been living on the earth, time out of mind, fighting great battles and building great cities. But somehow everything seemed to begin over again that year, because that was when the King came. And we have taken it ever since as the most important of all dates. When we say that this present year is nineteen-hundred-and-something, we mean that the Year One was just so many years ago.

It is always to be remembered about that year that one of its days was Christmas Day.

You may not think that strange. Christmas comes so regularly every year, like apples in autumn and snow in winter, that it seems to belong to the order of nature, and one may easily imagine that it has been celebrated always. But the truth is that there was never any Christmas until the Year One.

Year after year, and year after year, the ever-green trees grew in the woods and nobody came to get them. Nobody thought of lighting them up with candles or loading them down with candies. The twenty-fifth day of December came and went like the twenty-second and the twenty-ninth; and boys and girls grew up into men and women with never a Christmas carol nor a Christmas tree nor a Christmas gift and without having so much as heard of the singing angels or the Holy Child; because that was before the King came.

One cold night there were shepherds in a pasture close by the town of Bethlehem, watching their flocks. It was in the winter, and the stars were shining and all was still, and in the fields the flocks were sleeping while the shepherds watched. We may guess that, as they watched, they talked together and told one another stories; especially about David, who, when he was a boy, had lived at Bethlehem and had lain out many a night in that frosty pasture with his sheep, and once had killed a lion and a bear. The lion and the bear had come to get the sheep, and young David had fought with them and killed them. And they sang the Shepherd Psalm—"The Lord is my shepherd." And they spoke of the King of Glory,—how he would sometime come according to the promise; and they wondered how he would look and what he would do when he came. Then, as they watched and talked and sang, something happened.

All at once a great and wonderful light began to shine, brighter and brighter in the sky, till the night was like the day. All the clouds came out in the splendid garments which they wear in the early morning and in the late afternoon. And out of the central shining appeared an angel of the Lord, gleaming like a flame of fire. The shepherds fell upon their faces, not daring to look up, hardly daring to listen or to breathe, while the angel spoke. "Fear not," he said, "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. The King has come! Tonight he is born, yonder in Bethlehem. There shall you find him sleeping in a manger."

And then the sky grew brighter still, as if behind the clouds the gates of heaven itself were swinging open, and out there came angels upon angels, a multitude of the heavenly host, shining and singing. This is what they sang:

Glory to God in the highest

And on earth peace,

Good will towards men!

Then the chorus ceased, and the night was dark and still again; and the shepherds were alone.

So up they leaped, crying to one another with great joy, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see! Let us find the King!" And off they went down the frosty road, their eager feet making a great noise in the silent night and their breath white behind them.

All that day travelers had been journeying along the ways which led to Bethlehem. Cæsar Augustus, emperor of Rome, wished to know how many people were living in that part of the country, so that he could make them all pay taxes. Every man had to go to the place in which his family belonged. Out of Nazareth came Joseph the carpenter—because he was of the family of David—and Mary with him. Down they came, like other poor folk, over hill and dale, till they arrived at Bethlehem. But when they reached the town every house was full of guests and the inn was crowded; the only shelter was a stable, strewn with hay, with dusty cobwebs hanging from the rafters, and occupied by cows and donkeys. There they went.

And there, while the angels sang and the sky blazed over the pastures of the sheep, the King came! And, behold, he was a little child. And Mary wrapped him in swaddling clothes, as the way is with babies, and laid him in the manger.

There the shepherds found them—Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And they told what they had seen and heard,—about the singing angels and the King of Glory. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the wonders of that night. Thus was kept the first Christmas, with carols by the choir of heaven.

THE CHRISTMAS SONG

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold:
Peace on the earth, good will to men
From Heaven's all-gracious King—
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world.
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

O ye, beneath life's crushing load
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow!
Look now—for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing;
Oh, rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For, lo, the days are hastening on,
By prophets seen of old,
When with the ever circling years
Shall come the time foretold,
When the new Heaven and earth shall own
The Prince of Peace their King,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

—Edmund H. Sears.

THE CHEERFUL LETTER EXCHANGE

ITS PURPOSE

To cheer and comfort those who are ill, lonely, or discouraged, through the exchange of letters and by gifts of books and magazines.

To help those who live far from schools, or who wish to continue their studies by means of correspondence with a teacher.

To give to those living far from church some of the helps which churches give. One good sermon or similar article is printed in each number. These sermons are never doctrinal, but present only such simple religious truths and principles as are agreed on by all churches.

WHERE TO WRITE

1. *Letters paying for subscriptions to the paper*, fifty cents a year, should be sent to the Cheerful Letter Exchange, 16 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass. Checks or postal orders should be made payable to the Cheerful Letter Exchange.

2. *Letters asking for correspondents* should be sent to Mrs. W. B. Nichols, 25 Fairmount Way, Quincy, Mass.

3. *Letters asking for books, magazines, cards, etc.*, also letters offering to give books and magazines, should be sent to Mrs. Henry R. Austin, 100 Elm Ave., Wollaston, Mass.

4. *Letters asking for help in studying at home* should be sent to Mrs. George O. Sands, Brimble Ave., North Beverly, Mass.

The Home Study Committee has on hand a variety of schoolbooks which may be used by students either at home or in the schoolroom. The aim of the teachers is to help in any study where help is needed. Often this may fit a person for a higher grade of work.

5. *Letters about the establishment of Circulating Libraries* should be sent to Mrs. H. A. Stevens, 26 John St., Brookline, Mass.

A Circulating Library will be started in any small community needing one, if proper location and care can be furnished and satisfactory references can be given. One hundred and fifty-nine libraries are now on our lists.

6. The Secretary of the Cheerful Letter Exchange, Miss Ethel L. Hersey, Hingham, Mass., should receive the more general correspondence from workers on the local committees, or from others interested in the organization and its methods.